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Press seen as 'enemy' in White House

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CAMDEN, Maine — Former State Department spokesman Hodding Carter 3d says that some of the measures taken by President Jimmy Carter to control foreign policy leaks were offensive and demoralizing, and he blames Zbigniew Brzezinski for convincing the President that the State Department was the source.

Carter, who left the Administration this month, was critical of Brzezinski's National Security Council operation and said it was responsible for the "most substantive leaks."

In an interview Friday at his summer home in Camden, overlooking Penobscot Bay, Carter also said the Administration had a misconception about the way reporters work in this country.

The White House, he said, "sees the press as the enemy."

"There are some people there, who are major leakers themselves, who think the only way reporters get a story is through a leak. They think reporters are clods and animals, and that you simply feed them," said Carter, who is no relation to the President and who has spent much of his life as a journalist.

He left the government two weeks ago — not long after the resignation of his friend and boss, Cyrus Vance, as Secretary of State — and retreated to the quiet of Maine after 3½ years at the heart of the action in Washington.

However, he was pitched back into the maelstrom last week by a series of news stories involving leaks and bureaucratic strife. As he sat on a large rock rising out of the back lawn of a "castle" he purchased with part of the proceeds of the sale of the Mississippi newspaper his father founded and he once ran, Carter reflected on the infighting of the nation's foreign policy apparatus.

Carter's remarks came after reports that he had refused to sign an affidavit declaring that he was not responsible for leaks that led to a news story about a debate within the Administration over increased military aid to Morocco.

The article appeared in the Washington Post last October. It reportedly angered the President so much that he sought affidavits from such high-ranking officials as Vance, Brzezinski and CIA Director Stansfield Turner in which they professed their innocence.

Carter said he was approached by FBI agents. "I talked to them quite willingly. I told them it was not a story in which I was involved."

Shortly before he left the State Department — he announced his intention to resign shortly after Vance quit — Carter said he was presented with an affidavit to sign. "I was led to believe that it came from the highest levels of the White House. I refused to sign a presumptive statement that says I'm a good boy."

Asked if he had been offended by the affidavit, Carter said: "Of course I found it offensive. But I found it sillier than offensive. It was also counterproductive."

He said the President had depressed many members of the State Department hierarchy in an earlier attempt to stop leaks.

Vance and 16 other State Department officials were summoned to the White House in February 1979 for a dressing down after a report by CBS that US officials believed the Iranian government of Shapour Bakhtiar would soon fall.

The President, who was enraged over the story, according to accounts of the incident, threatened to fire any officials who had leaks coming out of their divisions at the State Department, even if the officials themselves were not directly responsible.

Carter, who was assistant secretary of state at the time, said he was "heartsick" after the meeting.

"I was mad. I felt it was a bum rap. I felt that the procedure amounted to a kangaroo court. It was a humiliation to Vance and destructive to the loyalty of those who had to sit there and be told: 'You are untrustworthy. You are my problem.'"

The Bakhtiar government fell within days of the meeting.

Carter is married to Patricia Derian, an assistant secretary of state in charge of human rights. She was also singled out in a Washington Post story last week as a prime suspect for leaks. "We start with Patt Derian and then we add to the list," an investigator of leaks was quoted as saying.

"Patt is articulate, and she opposes policy openly," Carter said. "Some of the idiots who work in government are not used to people speaking up. In a town which shoots from ambush, they can't believe anybody will look them in the eye and disagree."

It has been reported that there are 15 criminal investigations of leaks of military or diplomatic information, and that another 10 investigations were